

Given a series of details in paragraph form, the student summarizes the details into a main idea.

UNIT 4
Lesson 1
Understanding Details

TECHNICAL TALK

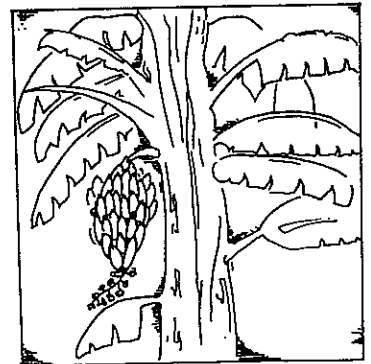
All of us have read articles and stories that contain a large number of details. An article of two or three hundred words may have as many as forty different details or facts, and it is sometimes difficult to decide on the main idea of the article. To find the main idea, you have to look for several things. First, look at the title. Does it tell you anything? Second, look for underlined words or words in capitals. Third, read the final sentences of the paragraphs since they may provide a clue.

TRY IT

Here is a short paragraph of four sentences. See if you can decide on the main idea in this paragraph.

The winter of 1979 was one of the coldest on record in Nebraska. Temperatures dropped to 20 degrees below zero and many cattle and other animals died. A few persons died from exposure to the cold when they were stranded on roads that were drifted over by snow. The weather caused hardships in many ways.

What did you decide? If you said something like "Nebraska had a very cold winter in 1979," you would be correct.



GUATEMALA: THE BANANA BELT

Below are two short paragraphs about the country of Guatemala. After you have read each paragraph, write down what you think the main idea of the paragraph is. Check your answer with the key to see if you are right.

1. The seasons of Guatemala are varied. Along the coast, the weather is very hot and the humidity is high. Not many people live in this area. The weather is cooler in higher elevations. There are two major seasons in the country. From November to May there is little or no rain while from May to November there is almost constant rain with many thundershowers.
2. Several types of trees grow in this country. The most important tree is the banana tree, though other trees such as the chicle and mahogany are also important. We get juice from the chicle for use in making chewing gum, and mahogany is used to make fine furniture. Another tree is the ceiba tree, which is used for kapok to stuff mattresses. Camphor and chinchona trees are used for making medicines.

REVIEW

UNIT 4

Lesson 2

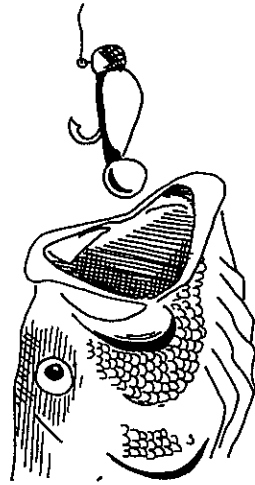
Understanding Details

Now try to pick out the main ideas in another series of paragraphs. Read each of the five paragraphs below and write down the main idea for each paragraph. When you are done, check the key to find out if your answers are right.



FAMINE, THE GREAT TRAGEDY

1. A famine is a time when there is not enough food to eat and people starve to death. It causes people to eat things that they do not ordinarily eat in order to keep alive, therefore many people become very ill during a famine. There have been many famines during the history of the world.
2. Many famines have occurred in China and India where they have large populations. Heavy rains sometimes flood the crops and ruin them. In other years there are droughts and the plants fail to grow. Since these countries lack modern methods of storage, they use only the food they can grow during one year.
3. In the 1930's a famine occurred in one area of the United States. It was caused by the great drought in Oklahoma, Kansas, and eastern Colorado. This area became known as the "dust bowl." The farmers could not grow wheat and other crops. Without crops to sell, the farmers had no money, so many farmers and their families went hungry.
4. One of the worst famines in history occurred in Egypt about 1450. It lasted seven years. During this time, there was little or no water in the Nile River so people could not water their crops. Food was not available, and thousands of people starved to death.
5. Famines are not as terrible as they used to be. If one country is short of food, another country can airlift food to them. An airplane can leave the U.S. and reach nearly any other part of the world in a short time. America has sent much food to other countries that have had famines. The United Nations has also helped people who have suffered from famines.



FROM SARDINES TO OYSTERS

The previous lesson has five short paragraphs. The lesson to follow also has five paragraphs. Write down the main idea for each paragraph, but be sure to read carefully and look for key words. Check the answer key to see how well you did.

1. Men have been fishing for thousands of years. In very early days, primitive people caught fish with their hands; later they speared the fish with long sharpened sticks. A few hundred years ago, some men made walls of sticks across streams to catch fish. Other people made crude nets of weeds to catch fish when they swam upstream.
2. When the colonists came to America, they started cod fishing. Today, in Washington and Oregon, salmon fishing is a big business. The Eskimos kill many whales for food and fat. Tuna fishing is a large industry on both coasts of the United States, and many fishermen fish for sardines. Thousands of people make their living by fishing.
3. Modern fishermen often use much equipment. They may fish from large refrigerated boats using nets that are power-towed. When the nets are pulled through the water, they pick up all kinds of fish. The workers use large knives to dress the fish and get it ready for market. The dressed fish are then placed in large, clean containers. These are stored in big refrigerators which cool the fish to keep it from spoiling.
4. Some fishermen today specialize in shellfish. They catch and sell clams, oysters, shrimp, and lobsters. In some places, workers build special fences in the water to protect the clams and oysters and when it is time the shellfish are gathered and processed like a plant crop. The best lobsters and clams come from the northeastern United States and the eastern coast of Canada.
5. Fishermen sell many other products besides the meat of fish. You may have used a sponge to wash your car. Sponges are found in several parts of the world. The shells of some sea creatures are used for jewelry and some of the fresh-water mussels found in the Mississippi River are useful for making buttons.

HOW DID YOU DO?

